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A PICTORIAL HISTORY OF THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

The Canberra district was first seen by white men less than 100 years before it was chosen as the site for the Australian National Capital.

In 1820, Governor Macquarie instructed Charles Throsby, a former naval surgeon interested in exploration, to search for the Murrumbidgee River which had been reported by Aborigines. Throsby sent Joseph Wild, an experienced bushman and explorer, with a party which included his nephew, Charles Throsby Smith and James Vaughan, to search for the Murrumbidgee. On this journey, the party camped on the plain on which Canberra now stands, and reported favourably on the district on their return. In subsequent years the country was opened up as grazing and farming land.

The building of the national capital was a duty imposed on Parliament by section 125 of the Constitution, which reads:

The seat of Government of the Commonwealth shall be determined by the Parliament, and shall be within territory which shall have been granted to or acquired by the Commonwealth, and shall be vested in and belong to the Commonwealth, and shall be in the State of new South Wales, and be distant not less than one hundred miles from Sydney.

Such territory shall contain an area of not less than one hundred square miles, and such portion thereof as shall consist of Crown lands shall be granted to the Commonwealth without any payment therefor.

The Parliament shall sit at Melbourne until it meet at the seat of Government.

After considering a number of possible sites the Commonwealth Parliament determined, in 1908, that the seat of government should be in the Yass-Canberra district and have access to the sea. The district Surveyor, Mr Charles R. Scrivener, was directed to examine the area and recommend a suitable site. Scrivener nominated 2,630 square kilometres in the watersheds of the Cotter, Queanbeyan and Molonglo Rivers and a further 930 hectares at Jervis Bay. A request of the surrender of the land was made to the New South Wales Government, and, after negotiation, an area of approximately 2,330 kilometres between the Queanbeyan-Cooma Railway, and the mountain ranges forming the western boundary of the watershed of the Cotter River plus Jervis Bay was selected.

Control of the Territory was assumed by the Commonwealth on 1 January 1911, when the Seat of Government (Administration) Act came into force.

With the transfer of the Territory from New South Wales, all Crown land passed to the Commonwealth without cost, but privately owned land which the Commonwealth required had to be purchased from the owners.

The decision to vest ownership of all land in the Crown was a very significant social experiment. The intention, which has been maintained, was that the Crown would continue to own the land, but would lease it for specified periods and under given conditions for residential, commercial, industrial and other purposes.

When the Commonwealth took control of the Australian Capital Territory in 1911 the site for the National Capital consisted of undulating grazing country, almost devoid of trees, the consequence of a harsh climate and the pastoral activities of the white settlers. The district population was 1,714 persons.

Seventy seven years later the limestone plains have been transformed into the garden city of Canberra with a population exceeding 250,000 people. It is one of the most outstanding urban landscape achievements seen in Australia and fast becoming one of the world's most beautiful capitals.

In April 1911, an international competition for the design of the new city was launched. From 137 designs received, the first prize was awarded to Walter Burley Griffin, a Chicago architect.

Fundamental principles of the Griffin plan were:

- The geometric pattern of the design;
- The treatment of the flood plain, useless for building purposes, to form a lake to be the unifying feature of the northern and southern parts of Canberra;
- The formation of a grand visual axis from the top of Mount Ainslie to Capital Hill; and
- The separation of national and municipal functions; this was proposed by the locating of all buildings associated with national affairs in an integrated group on the southern side of the lake and locating buildings associated with civic matters in a commanding position on the north side.

The basic Griffin plan has been closely followed in the development of Canberra.

On 12 March 1913, an official ceremony marked the formal establishment of the Seat of Government. The Foundation Stone was laid on Capital Hill jointly by the Governor-General, Lord Denman, the Prime Minister. Rt. Hon. Andrew Fisher, and the Minister for Home Affairs. the Hon. King O'Malley.

At this ceremony, Lady Denman announced Canberra as the name for the Capital City.

Before World War 1 brought activities almost to a halt, a power house was erected and a railway branch line from Queanbeyan was completed. Brick works were established, the Cotter Dam to store water for the city was started, and the Royal Military College was established at Duntroon.

Between 1921 and 1923 work on engineering services proceeded and main and subsidiary roads were formed. Residential buildings were started and sites were established for hotels and guest houses. The Canberra to Queanbeyan railway was opened for passenger traffic in 1923.

The Commonwealth Parliament continued to meet in Melbourne until 1927 when the new

Parliament House in Canberra was opened by His Royal Highness, The Duke of York (afterward His Majesty King George VI) in 1927.

As the economic situation improved again approval was given for the building of the Australian War Memorial and a building for the National Library, the recommencement of the administration building (on which work had started in 1927) the construction of the Patents Office, and the commencement of a new hospital. The growth in the city's population, though less than expected, necessitated the building of more roads, schools and public utilities. However, the outbreak of World War II in 1939 diverted resources to military purposes, and house construction and transfer of government departments to Canberra were postponed.

ACT POPULATION

1911	1,714
1920	1,972
1925	3,936
1930	8,719
1940	9,760
1945	14,160
1950	23,579
1955	33,470
1960	55,272
1965	85,500
1970	131,500
1975	199,000
1980	224,300
1985	250,000

Population growth exceeded 50% every 5 years from 1955 to 1975.

Since 1962 the metropolitan growth of Canberra has been catered for in a series of new towns.

Three of these new towns - Woden-Weston Creek, Belconnen and Tuggeranong - are in various stages of development while planning has been undertaken for a fourth new town, Gungahlin. Together with inner Canberra, they will be capable of accommodating about half a million people. Canberra's population is now approaching 260,000.

The new towns are being planned and built with many of the characteristics of independent

towns, with their own commercial, employment and retail centres, each having the potential to develop its own individual character. All will be linked by a comprehensive transportation system including roads, cycleways and an intertown public transport system and each will accommodate some of the national capital functions of Canberra.

One of these functions is the provision of office space for government departments and agencies which, with the development of private-enterprise facilities, assists in the decentralisation of employment opportunities to the new town centres.

After World War II Canberra's development quickened and a scheme to progressively transfer Commonwealth Government departments to Canberra was formulated. With a requirement for permanent administrative buildings, hostel accommodation and suburban growth to cater for the influx, the need for a single authority to coordinate planning, development and construction became evident. Subsequently the National Capital Development Commission (NCDC) was established and assumed control of Canberra's further development on 1 March 1958.

The new Commission endorsed the view that Canberra must have features to distinguish it from other cities, and that these features could emerge from the existence in the heart of Canberra of a large park-like landscape, bounded on the three sides by King's Avenue, Commonwealth Avenue and Constitution Avenue. The Commission also recommended to the Government that the Canberra lake, and essential feature of the original concept, should proceed. These proposals were approved by the Government. As well as being a simple and decorative feature in itself, the lake was also a fundamental requirement for the integrated growth of the approved city, as the recurring flooding of the Molonglo Flood plain made it unsuitable for building sites. Major construction work was completed by the end of 1963 and the lake was named Burley Griffin after the man whose plan was responsible for its creation.

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